Interview with David S. Smith

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR DAVID S. SMITH

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is May 17, 1989. This is an interview with Ambassador David Shiverick Smith. Mr. Ambassador, you mentioned that you have a few comments you would like to make before we get into the body of this interview. So I'll turn it over to you.

SMITH: All right, sir. Fine. I just tried to collect my thoughts a little bit while driving over here, and I thought that perhaps since there is often public comment about the difference in background or training between career and non-career officers, maybe it was in order just to say a couple of words about my own background to show that I had at least a slight knowledge of foreign affairs before I was appointed ambassador. With that in mind, I might say that I was a history major in college. I graduated from Dartmouth College (magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa) and during my junior year took a degree at the Sorbonne and attended classes at the Ecole de Science Politique in Paris. I also studied in Germany outside of Munich and in 1939 studied at the University of Mexico.

Q: Could you give some dates there?

SMITH: Yes, I graduated from Dartmouth in 1939. I studied in Paris for a year in 1938 at the Sorbonne and at the Ecole de Science Politique. Then I spent two summers in

Germany living with friends and studying both German and German history outside of Munich in the country at Tutzing. That was in the summers of 1937 and 1938.

Q: I was going to say, if you graduated in 1939 from Dartmouth, that would not have been the best years to be messing around in either France or Germany.

SMITH: No, that's true. It was before that I was there. Then I studied at the University of Mexico the summer after I graduated from Dartmouth in 1939. At that time, Americans could not study in Spain (as I would have preferred) because there was a civil war going on there as you know. That afforded me the opportunity to become quite fluent in French, German and Spanish. I also studied Italian and traveled quite a bit in Italy, so I became moderately fluent in Italian. Then I went on to Columbia Law School, graduated in 1942 and was admitted to the bar of New York. I went on active duty in August 1942 as an officer in the United States Navy. I served four years in the Navy mainly at sea in the South Pacific and in the Far East. Then I returned to Breed, Abbott and Morgan on Wall Street and practiced law there. My first position in government was in 1954 when I served for a year as Special Assistant in the office of John Foster Dulles. Then I went to the Pentagon where I served for nearly five years as Assistant Secretary of the Air Force during the Eisenhower Administration.

Q: What type of work were you doing as Assistant Secretary?

SMITH: I was Assistant Secretary for Manpower, Personnel and Reserves and did some Intelligence work. I was actually the youngest Assistant Secretary in the Eisenhower Administration at that time, and I really enjoyed serving as a civilian official in a military department during a period when the United States preeminence in world affairs was unequaled and virtually unchallenged. At the end of the Eisenhower Administration, I returned to New York where I engaged in the practice of law and also had some academic experience. I served for 15 years as Associate Dean of the Graduate School of International Affairs at Columbia University and founded the International Fellows Program

there which was an Interdisciplinary Program designed to encourage young men who were interested in later government service, foreign service or otherwise, to include some studies of international affairs along with their graduate career studies in the disciplines of economics, political science, history or in their programs at the Graduate School of Law, Journalism, Business, or Medicine. I very much enjoyed teaching and preparing young people to have some understanding of foreign affairs, and to prepare themselves to spend at least part of their career in government.

During that time, I was a partner in the firm of Baker & McKenzie, an international law firm with offices in 19 countries around the world, and part of my assignment was to help open the offices in foreign countries as the firm was expanding abroad. So I had a rather broad experience in international law during that 15-year period. I was also fairly active in international study groups. I was an active member of the Council on Foreign Relations and attended its meetings in New York on a weekly basis. I was also a director of the Foreign Policy Association and later became a member of the Washington Institute for Foreign Affairs, which now that I live in Washington I still go to regularly. I also became a member of the Advisory Council of Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (called SAIS) and still serve as a member of its Advisory Council.

I might say that when I later arrived in Swedenas United States Ambassador, I realized how fortunate I was to have a wife who also had a good background to serve as the wife of an ambassador. Having been a New York debutante, she graduated from Spence School in New York and from Barnard College where she majored in Fine Arts, and then studied at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland, and became fluent in French and Italian. Later she had worked in a large New York advertising agency and subsequently in a New York City real estate firm. So she had not only great grace and intelligence but also very serious academic preparation.

Q: A very important matter.

SMITH: It seemed to me fortunate to have a wife who appreciated the responsibilities of the ambassador and her own responsibility. I might say that I had an extra short period of preparation for being ambassador to Sweden. After President Ford told me he would like me to go there as ambassador, we immediately started studying Swedish. The Swedish Ambassador arranged for members of his staff to come to our house in Georgetown and give us instruction in Swedish, both my wife and me, on a daily basis until we left for Sweden. And we continued that Swedish study when we were in Sweden. I might add it's a very difficult language. I had, of course, the intensive briefings that the Department gives to every prospective ambassador. Then I had one great advantage. The King of Sweden was coming on a goodwill mission during that period to the United States, and although I was not yet confirmed by the Senate, the Swedish Ambassador knew that I was going to be in Sweden so he arranged for me to have meetings with the King and all of his many advisors who were making a goodwill trip across the country. It was a great advantage to me later when I arrived in Sweden to have met many of the Swedish Establishment under those circumstances. I also saw them all again about three weeks later when they made a visit in New York before their return to Sweden.

So I was confirmed by the United States Senate and went to Sweden in May of 1976. At that time, announcement had already been made of the planned visit of Henry Kissinger to Sweden, the first visit to Sweden ever in history of a United States Secretary of State. It was a return, in effect, for the King's visit here. And since I had been told I would be participating actively in the visit, I felt it was important to call on all of the members of the Cabinet before the Secretary arrived in two weeks. So instead of starting on diplomatic calls, I spent considerable time calling on all the members of the Swedish Cabinet and had an opportunity to get to know them a little bit before the Secretary arrived. I had known the Prime Minister before I went to Sweden by good fortune. Olaf Palme used to come fairly often, a couple of times a year, to New York where he usually spoke at the Council of Foreign Relations and also frequently visited at Columbia University. So I had gotten

to know him a little bit although I had no thought at that time, of course, of ever serving in Sweden.

I'd like to, if I might, describe just briefly the high points of Henry Kissinger's visit.

Q: All right. Please do.

SMITH: It was really most interesting for me as a brand-new ambassador two weeks after my arrival to participate in those events. He spent pretty much two whole days in meetings with the Prime Minister, very small, intimate meetings. About seven or eight men sat around a table in the Foreign Ministry with Kissinger and me on one side and the Prime Minister on the other side with a few members of the Cabinet. The conversations ranged—of course, the whole gamut of world policy. It was a Tour d'Horizon for the Prime Minister and his Cabinet officers to become familiar with the Secretary's view of United States foreign policy. Of course, it was punctuated by very brilliant social engagements, luncheons and dinners at the Palace and the Foreign Ministry. Later the Secretary appeared at the Swedish equivalent of the Council on Foreign Relations and, of course, held a press conference that was televised worldwide.

Through all of those events, I had the great good fortune to be seated at the Secretary's side and to feel I was in a way a participant, and that was certainly a great advantage for a new, particularly for a non-career ambassador, for any ambassador at any time, to have his service in the country launched by active participation with the world figure that Mr. Kissinger was. It certainly had an impact, I think, on the Swedes and the reception I had, which throughout my stay there was extremely cordial. The feelings of anti-Americanism that had been engendered by the Vietnam war seemed totally dissipated except in very limited quarters, and I was made to feel throughout very, very welcome.

I would also like to mention something I did on an impulse, more or less on the spur of the moment, and which I suppose had I been a more seasoned diplomat I would not have done. When I mentioned to my staff that I was thinking of doing it, they all very

much discouraged it and said it would not be a good idea. But I went ahead anyway. The next morning immediately after the Secretary left I asked the entire Embassy staff, both the American officers and also the Swedish employees at the Embassy, to join me in the courtyard at the Chancery. I had a lectern and a microphone put there, and I spent more than a couple of hours describing in some detail the entire visit. I really felt that these good people who spent their life working hard for the American Embassy had seen virtually nothing of Kissinger's visit except what they might have caught on television because, of course, it was all very guarded. So I described to them the Haga Palace where the Secretary stayed and the meetings with the Prime Minister and the luncheons and festivities with the King. Obviously there was no discussion of any classified matter, but I must say, I think it gave a tremendous boost to morale in the embassy.

Q: I know. It makes excellent sense.

SMITH: I had been told in Washington before I went to Sweden that perhaps my number-one assignment there was to try to boost morale at the embassy because for a couple of rather particular reasons they said it was at an all-time low. I really think that move that I made on an impulse had a tremendous effect. For weeks afterwards I'd often be stopped in the courtyard by someone in the embassy who said to me how much they had appreciated having had the opportunity when I was still brand-new there to hear me get up and speak to all of them and to describe in detail a visit that was to them of tremendous importance and which they had really not seen or heard anything about other than the headlines in the paper or brief glimpses on television of Kissinger's visit. So I was glad I did it.

I might say that during the time I was in Sweden, I tried without being brash or out of line to be a little innovative in such fields as I could. I think there are some things that a non-career ambassador can do that, maybe, might be more difficult for a career ambassador to do. Just as a couple of examples, I instituted the custom of having a stag luncheon at the residence every couple of weeks, a small one, for one Cabinet officer of the Swedish

government and the top four or five officers on my staff. It was a rather formal luncheon. We were fortunate enough to live very well with a good staff at the residence. Usually my wife appeared for five minutes or so to greet people in the drawing room over a glass of sherry, then excused herself and we met for a couple of hours. It gave my top staff officers a chance to speak with members of the Swedish Government that they told me they would normally not have the opportunity even to meet, let alone have an in depth discussion with them of matters in Sweden. Of course, it led to many reports to Washington of at least what was presented as an inside view of Swedish views on their policies.

Another thing that I tried to do was to demand that all the people in the embassy give as much help as they could to American businessmen when they were there. I thought it was important to encourage commerce and exchange, and I felt it was tremendously important that the embassy lend its hand to help American businessmen expand their efforts. I also tried hard to devote more time to meeting and seeing Swedes rather than foreign diplomats. In our social life, although we certainly saw a great deal of experienced foreign diplomats who were there at the normal engagements that take place in a capital, we also tried hard to spend a great deal of time with representatives of industry, of academic life, of political life, of the media, from farming and agriculture, and from the labor unions. Of course, the labor unions in Sweden occupy a very special role, and they take part in the government, too. So that was another major effort I made.

Then another one that occurs to me, when the Swedish Ambassador to the United States, Count Wilhelm Wachtmeister, returned home to Stockholm for consultation, I invited him to come down to the embassy for a conference in our conference room with some 15 or 20 members of my staff. It went on for a couple of hours, and he at the time said to me that in his entire career as a diplomat, he'd never been asked to do that, but he really enjoyed it. My staff thought it was interesting to hear exchanges between him and me on the differences between his embassy in Washington and our embassy in Stockholm.

We also tried hard to support and project the presence of prominent United States citizens when they were in Sweden by entertaining for them at the Residence and attending events planned for their visits. For instance, athletes, there were important meets of skiers. There were sailors for America's Cup races who met and talked to the Swedish participants. Several contemporary artists came, and we always entertained for them and tried to arrange for them to meet people in the Swedish art circles, people like Andy Warhol and Motherwell and others. Also entertainers such as Sammy Davis and Danny Kaye to mention a couple. I guess every ambassador, of course, does those things, but in any event, life in Sweden was extremely varied and wonderful, and we enjoyed every minute of it.

I might mention and then I'll turn to you, sir, and let you lead the conversation, we were so fortunate to have a number of really noteworthy events take place during the time we were in Sweden. The first, of course, was the visit by Henry Kissinger to Sweden. Then just a few weeks after that there was the King's wedding. It was the first time in a couple of hundred years that a reigning monarch in Sweden had been married, and it was a tremendously important wedding. The whole city came to a standstill, and there were all sorts of very important occasions. We went to the wedding and participated in it. By that time I had come to know the King and his bride who became the new Queen and saw something of them in small gatherings. Then a few months later, his uncle, the heir to the throne at that time, Prince Bertil, married the lady who had been his very good friend of many years and who is now Princess Lillian. Throughout our first year there were a great many celebrations of the American Bicentennial which led to all kinds of important occasions. A few months later at the awarding of the Nobel Prizes, the United States made a clean sweep. For the first time in history, one nation won all the Nobel Prizes. The United States won them all, and when all of those Prize winners came to Sweden, it made a very important occasion. Instead of having representatives from other countries, all of the Nobel Prize winners that year were from the United States.

The New York Philharmonic Orchestra came to Sweden for a concert, and the Queen and King went to it with us as our guest. Later, my good friend Chief Justice Warren Burger and his wife came to Sweden and spent two weeks as guests at the residence. This led, of course, to a great many important meetings with all of the leaders of the Bar and the legal community. We were also visited by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General David Jones, and that led to many and very interesting reviews of both the Swedish Air Force and also the other armed services. We also had our fair share of visits by Congressional delegations.

But the most important event of all was the change in government in Sweden. It was the first change in 44 years. When the labor government, the socialist government, fell from power, Olaf Palme lost his position as Prime Minister and a coalition of three other parties formed a new government. It was a very interesting occasion. The three parties, since they had been out of power for the entire lifetime of most of their leaders, sent representatives to the adjoining Scandinavian countries to ask them, “How do we go about forming a government?” They were then out of touch with things, but they eventually got together and formed a government which did very well for a while, though Olaf Palme made it very plain from the beginning that he thought it was just a brief interlude, that he was out of office just a very short time and it wouldn't last long.

I think I've talked long enough, perhaps, and I should give you an opportunity to pose some questions here.

Q: All right. Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Ambassador, I would go a little into your background again.

SMITH: All right.

Q: You were born in Omaha?

SMITH: Yes, I was.

Q: And how did a young lad from Omaha end up going to Dartmouth, rather than sort of sticking to the Mississippi Valley?

SMITH: Well, I guess my family, although both my mother and my father had been born in Omaha, and on both sides they came from old pioneer families, they always had many contacts and interests in world affairs. I learned to speak French at home as a child, and we occasionally spoke French at the table. My parents encouraged my interest in international affairs and certainly encouraged my study abroad and travel.

Q: You were in Europe as a young man at a very interesting time. Quickly, could you sort of give the dates and the places once again?

SMITH: Yes.

Q: These are impressions that you carry with you for the rest of your life. You're senses are most acute, and it's all new. What were you bringing out of Europe at this very, very important time in world history?

SMITH: I took my junior year abroad from Dartmouth and studied, as I said, at the Sorbonne and the Ecole de Science Politique.

Q: And this would be?

SMITH: This was in 1937 and 1938. We started by studying a couple of months in the fall in Tours, where, as you know, the French is very, very pure and that brought the whole group—it was under the auspices of the University of Delaware—who were so kind as to give me a scholarship and made that trip possible. After two months at Tours, we went to classes at the Sorbonne starting the first of November. As you probably know, they have no exams of any kind for the whole year and suddenly in June you're faced with both oral

and written exams and you had better have been studying all that time and not playing too much in Paris. It was a wonderful experience. I loved my life there and found that my preparation at the Omaha Central High School stood me in very good stead to stand up beside French students and I did all right and I enjoyed it a great deal.

Then those two summers I studied, as I said, at Tutzing outside of Munich, living with a German family and speaking German all the time and traveling a little bit around Germany with German contemporaries, young men in that family and their neighbors. In Tutzing, Baron von Fraunberg, the head of the family with whom I was living, went two nights a week to Reserve training meetings. He was an elderly, retired colonel, but he had to go in his army uniform and red swastika armband to the meetings. Very discreetly, he and the baroness made fun of the Nazis when there were no other Germans around. It was, indeed, a difficult time. The Nazi Government was in power. I saw Hitler speak from a balcony. By the way, I saw Mussolini speak from a balcony in Rome, too. One was terribly aware of the military and of the movement of troops. When I bicycled over a good part of Germany and Italy, I saw soldiers everywhere. In Germany, the young men who were my age and contemporaries were all doing Arbeitzdienst, their two years of service in work service camps before they went into the Army.

Q: Work service.

SMITH: Yes. Two years of work service. Certainly one formed a life-long impression of the Nazi Party and its government of Germany and of the fascists in Italy. When I finally finished that second summer and returned home in September, 1938 to enter my senior year at Dartmouth, the war was, of course, about to start. It did leave many lasting impressions on me.

Q: Of course, the war caught you as it did almost every male of the generation, but did you have any feelings toward government service particularly involvement in foreign affairs while you were in the service and thereafter?

SMITH: Not too much during the service. I very much enjoyed serving at sea in the Navy. Life for a young officer who was not married and torn away from his family had all kinds of benefits. I served at sea. I had a lot of exciting times and volunteered to go in under fire in landing craft on Japanese-occupied islands. I was awarded the Purple Heart at Saipan for wounds in actions, and saw horrible destruction of Japanese fortifications. I never really thought seriously of continuing in the military service. Before I went into the Navy during my young days while I was at Dartmouth and at Columbia Law School, certainly I often thought of the Foreign Service. I came from a family of extremely modest means, and quite frankly I felt I wanted—perhaps I had my priorities wrong, but I felt I should spend some time first trying to make myself financially independent before I took time to serve in government. But I always had in the back of my mind, always, that I would like to serve in government.

Q: How and when did your first government assignment come about as the Special Assistant to John Foster Dulles?

SMITH: I became active in Young Republican activities. I served on the Board of Governors. This was when I was a young lawyer after the war. I never had done any political activity until then. By that time I was about 25 and practicing law on Wall Street. I became a governor of the New York Young Republican Club and simultaneously I spend a good deal of time, evenings, in Connecticut and founded a Young Republican Club in the community where I lived, in Greenwich, and took a statewide activity there, becoming Vice-Chairman of the Connecticut Young Republicans. So I became very enthusiastic when it was first known that President Eisenhower, then General Eisenhower, would run for President. I helped the founding of Citizens for Eisenhower, and took an active part in his campaign. Actually, I was asked by the Republican Town Committee of Greenwich to run for Congress when Clare Boothe Luce vacated her seat but after conferring with senior partners of my law firm I declined, and they ultimately asked John Davis Lodge,

who was elected to Congress, and ultimately became Ambassador to Spain, and later to Switzerland.

Q: This was in 1952?

SMITH: Yes, sir. And I took a leave of absence from my law firm and served in the Eisenhower campaign. Those days were very exciting, and at the end of the campaign I was determined to serve in government. It took a little while before I was able to find a niche. I think government bureaucrats don't make it easy for a young man to receive an appointment. I started at a very low level in the Department of State doing some personnel work. It was a hard wrench with a wife and children to move down to a very unglamorous job which lasted for a couple of months. Then I had the good fortune to find myself catapulted up into the Office of the Secretary and very much enjoyed working for him.

Q: What type of work were you doing with Secretary Dulles?

SMITH: My work was mainly in the personnel field. It was my responsibility to present to the Secretary lists of names—at least part of my responsibility. I had various responsibilities, but particularly interesting perhaps for our discussion was to present lists of names of qualified career officers and in some cases where he requested it of potential non-career officers for appointments within the Department.

Q: How did the personnel system work at that time? We're talking about an era that has changed considerably. Things have gotten much more bureaucratized, I think.

SMITH: It certainly has. I don't know what to say. Certainly I have always had—I did then and I do even a great deal more so now—a very deep and profound respect for the career service, the career Foreign Service officers, and it seemed to me they had—I think we're all familiar with what their promotion and personnel activities were at that time. The Foreign Service was, I guess, a little more “clubby” one might say at that time.

Q: It was beginning to expand considerably because of the Wriston Program about that time.

SMITH: Yes, it was. Exactly. I was there when the Wriston Program was inaugurated and took part in it.

Q: I might add for the record that the Wriston Program was named after Henry Wriston, which was the amalgamation of the Civil Service, who had since the beginning of the republic had basically staffed most of the positions within the Department of State in Washington, and the Foreign Service which had served abroad. Now Foreign Service and Civil Service were put together into one group and they would equally serve abroad and in Washington.

SMITH: That's correct. I knew Henry Wriston and part of my responsibility was to help carry out the report that was approved by Secretary Dulles, the Wriston Report. I might say we had a great many hurdles. There was considerable opposition to it in many quarters. It was not easy. I notice that one of my predecessors in these interviews was Frances Knight. Of course, she took an important part in that. But a great many people assisted the Secretary in putting that into effect. I think, certainly my opinion is that it has been a very successful procedure, and I do feel we are remarkably well represented overseas. It seems to be a good thing to have the interchange of Foreign Service officers not staying as they used to for many, many years abroad and getting out of touch with matters in this country. I think the return to the United States is good for anyone. So I think in some, I'm not sure how you may feel or others, but —

Q: I came in after it and that was just a way of life.

SMITH: I saw it before and it certainly was quite different. Many career Foreign Service officers had spent nearly 20 years abroad and really were rather out of touch with things in the United States.

Q: Sure. Can you describe Henry Wriston? He's an important figure often overlooked by those who are looking at the history of the State Department. How did he operate and deal with a situation?

SMITH: Not too much. I did not work with Dr. Wriston. I knew him. I had known him at the Council on Foreign Relations and other meetings in New York before I came to Washington. I saw him briefly, but I never worked with him. I'm afraid I couldn't, actually. He was a very broad gauge, extremely intelligent, determined and capable man. I certainly respected him. But I can't describe him.

Q: Did you serve close to Dulles?

SMITH: Yes, I did.

Q: I wonder if you could tell your relationship and how you viewed Dulles, his way of operating?

SMITH: I regarded him as a really dedicated man. I occasionally had lunch with him. It was his custom to have lunch alone or with one person in his office as often as he could. His usual fare for lunch was a raw apple, which he peeled slowly, and a small dish of cottage cheese, which to a young man was pretty amazing. I had a good, full appetite and liked a three-course meal, but that was what he usually had for lunch. He usually arrived about 8:00 every morning and stayed in the office until he took a shower about 6:00 and changed either to a black tie or white tie to go to some diplomatic function. He was just an extremely hard driving, aesthetic, devoted public servant. One thing that impressed me tremendously was that he never took any important action without picking up the white telephone at his desk and calling the President and describing it to the President and giving his recommendation for an outcome and asking the President's decision. I never was in the office when the President disagreed with him. I didn't hear the other end of the conversation, but I had the impression that the President usually said, “Well, that's

fine, Foster. Let's go ahead as you suggest." But at least I was very impressed. It was a lesson to a young man on how to keep a good relationship going for eight years, or nearly eight until he died, that he was scrupulous always to keep the President fully informed and totally briefed on any important matter.

Q: One has the feeling in the interviews that we're doing that the President was not a passive bystander at all during his administration. I mean, he, of course, had studied under De Gaulle, Churchill and Roosevelt, so he was a knowledgeable person. Did you find with Dulles that you could sort of talk Wall Street lawyer to him or not?

SMITH: In discussion, of course, we were both Wall Street lawyers. I had been at Breed, Abbott & Morgan and he at Sullivan & Cromwell which were just a couple of floors apart in the same building. Actually, I don't recall that we ever discussed Wall Street law matters at all in any way. He, as you know, had spent a lifetime in preparation for being Secretary of State, and had planned his career. But I don't remember we ever discussed Wall Street law matters.

Q: You were there and dealing with personnel at a very difficult time because of McCarthy. We are speaking about Senator Joseph McCarthy, which became known as the era of McCarthyism, in which there was a generally perceived or conceived by some people as being sort of a witch hunt of people. The Foreign Service was badly infected and affected by this. Dulles was also perceived as someone who was not a strong supporter of the Foreign Service at this time in that he didn't—this is at least the perception — take a stand particularly on people, the China hands, but there were many others who were allegedly pushed out of the Service or their career suffered. This is a long preamble, but how did you view this dealing with personnel, Dulles and the State Department on the Foreign Service at this time?

SMITH: Well, certainly no one could be in those offices at that time without being well aware of the situation you described. To begin with, Mr. Dulles was a lifelong, well-trained

lawyer who was extremely knowledgeable about diplomatic history, American history and foreign policy. He was also a very devout Christian and a very serious, thoughtful man and certainly made every effort to be just. Of course, there was by impact of Senator Joseph McCarthy, and I think every thinking person regarded him as having considerable power. Mr. Dulles certainly never espoused the idea “Let's run the rascals out!” There were certain individuals, of course, who were brought to his attention as people that he had to cope with the background that they had built up. He did take into the Department, possibly it was a mistake, but under the pressure of two or three other leading, extremely conservative senators —

Q: I think this would be who?

SMITH: Scott McLeod —

Q: Well, I'm talking about the senators would be William Nolan, I suppose?

SMITH: Yes.

Q: The names begin to escape me.

SMITH: Yes. He had taken in a few very conservative Republicans. He took in Scott McLeod and a couple of others who certainly were extremely conservative Republicans and who certainly caused him hours of concern over matters that were brought to the Secretary's attention. Some of those people had very long security files. I remember seeing one that was three or four piles of papers that were each about four feet high of their background materials and reports, of course, unsubstantiated reports of incidents. Under pressures of people like Senator McCarthy, the Secretary felt he had to give very serious thought to what to do. I must say, he never took any action on any of those cases without giving it a great many hours of time he would have preferred devoting to foreign policy. As you know, personnel can be an extremely time-consuming matter, and he was a

very serious and just man who tried to deal with these matters in the way that was best for the United States, I think.

Q: In your position of feeding names in for positions, did you get any pressure, say, from Scott McLeod, who was then in charge of security and counselor affairs, I believe, at the time, from him in the Department or from the right wing of the Republican Party to get their people in or not? I mean, did you feel this personally, sort of pushing?

SMITH: Sir, even at that age, although I was only 31 then, I really felt quite independent. I had my law practice back in New York that I could return to at any time, and I certainly don't remember feeling pressured at any time in my life, either then or when I later became Assistant Secretary of the Air Force. I certainly did have contact with conservative Republican senators. I had discussions with Scott McLeod. I never felt that I was being subjected to pressure, and I certainly would have reacted extremely badly to it, and I don't think any one individual would have tried it a second time.

Q: What was your impression of Scott McLeod? What I'm trying to do is, so you understand, I'm trying to recreate an era because people get these names and it comes to them and I'm trying to get people to say how they observed these people at the time rather than just leave it to sort of historical judgment on the documents.

SMITH: I knew Scott McLeod. I think he was a hard-working, dedicated public servant trying to do a job. He was responsible for security, and I think, he the same as many other American citizens then, felt that there were some people in moderately high places in government service who were not loyal to the United States. Some people call that a witch hunt. Some call it being realistic. You can call it what you will depending on your inclination. But, rightly or wrongly, I think he felt there were people there who were not loyal to the United States, and he felt it was his duty, as part of his overall duties—I might say a rather small part of his duties—I think he was concerned with doing a good job for

the Department. But certainly I think he felt in his own mind that part of that was to see that people who were not loyal to the United States did not continue in office.

Q: Moving from that, because I've dwelled a little more on that than normal, because there was —

SMITH: Yes, I hadn't planned to. This is a long time back.

Q: No. But this was an important era, and it's very difficult for people to reconstruct what is happening. So I do talk to other people particularly in personnel at that time. I'm going to be concentrating on the foreign affairs deal, but you were dealing in the Air Force. You moved rather soon into the Air Force. How did that assignment come about?

SMITH: Well, I'll be glad to tell you. I had taken a leave of absence of one year from my law firm, having participated in the political campaign of General Eisenhower, as I mentioned to you earlier. I was really eager to follow him to Washington. I had a lifelong interest in it, and I was anxious to go into government. So when I finally got there, I really worked very hard at it and tried my best to make good use of my time knowing that I only had a year to be in Washington and having become very devoted to Secretary Dulles and to the experience of being close to high foreign policy, sitting in on his daily staff conferences with all the assistant secretaries each morning. I was really very enthusiastic and very much taken by it.So I was thoroughly enjoying this year in Washington, but very conscious that the clock was ticking and that I had only a year. I had a wife and three little boys. I was only 31, and I felt a little bit guilty that I had taken this time out from my career having previously taken four years to be in the war. I really felt I had an obligation to get back to my law firm and a serious practice.

So as we approached the end of the year, I went to Secretary Dulles. I had been waiting for a moment when I found him in a relaxed mood. I said to him, “Mr. Secretary, I just want to remind you that I will be going back to New York to my law firm in just about a month or

so, and I do think you should begin to look for a replacement. I took this position for one year and the year is nearly up."

And he said to me, "Well, David, you know I'm leaving for a conference in Germany tomorrow. But please don't do anything about this until I get back and we talk about it, because I've already spoken to President Eisenhower about you, and I think he has something in mind for you at another agency but at a very much higher level. So wait until I get back."

So I did and very shortly I learned that the President wanted me to become Assistant Secretary of the Air Force at a time when all of the other assistant secretaries were my father's age and I would be dealing daily with four-star generals in a very exciting life. So it didn't take me too much to decide that law or no law I wanted to try the Pentagon. That's why I went there.

Q: You mentioned something there, and I want to go back before we talk about the Air Force, that you attended Dulles' daily meetings. I wonder if you could describe how he operated in the meetings?

SMITH: Yes, I'd be glad to. He had two levels of meetings. One was a very small meeting of just three or four officers in his office that he sometimes held. But he held regularly scheduled, almost daily, meetings of all the assistant secretaries. That was in a larger conference room with assistant secretaries around the table and the Secretary setting at the head of the table. They started, as I recall, about 9:00 on intelligence that had already been finished and all that. This was to get a direct report individually from the different assistant secretaries on their geographic areas, developments that they felt were significant that might or might not have been covered in the intelligence briefings, their views and recommendations. It was, to me, a very exhilarating occasion which, in some ways, was a great opportunity for the Secretary to display his incredibly detailed knowledge gained from a lifelong study of diplomatic and government history. If the

Assistant Secretary for Latin America might be speaking about a border dispute between two adjacent countries, for example, the Secretary would be apt to make a remark like this, “Well, don't forget now, do go back and study how that discussion would be influenced by the treaties between those two countries of 1832 and then the Treaty of 1871 which was later modified by the Treaty of 1890 in that border dispute and further modified in 1906 and 1917.” It was incredible. He had a tremendous grasp, and it would be the same in any part of the world whether it was the Far East or Europe or South America. He had an incredible grasp of detail of diplomatic history of foreign countries and, in effect, I feel and I've understood from others, he had been studying to be Secretary of State pretty much all of his life and it showed. He was a very self-contained, quiet, controlled man of considerable wisdom and determination.

Q: We're a jump ahead back to the Secretary. Now this interview, of course, is dealing with foreign affairs, so my question on the Air Force side is, did you have any dealings or did you observe the Air Force as it dealt with base problems, foreign affairs? My question for this is often there seems to be a problem that the military—we were talking about an era when we were going out and getting bases, doesn't understand the baggage, the political problems that go along with putting bases in. Did you get any feel for how they approached this while you were doing this work?

SMITH: Oh, yes, I did. They already had most of the bases by the time I came into the Air Force.

Q: This was when?

SMITH: That was 1954.

Q: When in 1954?

SMITH: Toward the end of that year.

Q: All right.

SMITH: And most of the bases had already been acquired. I might say initially that the difference between individuals and their method of operation and the decision-making process and the whole atmosphere at the Pentagon was a striking change from the operations and decision-making process in the State Department. I couldn't help being very, very struck at the difference. In general I think people, whether it be bureaucratic Civil Service people or Foreign Service officers, in the Department of State, would be perhaps a little more leisurely, more inclined to review in detail as a lawyer would, all the consequences of moving in one direction or moving in the opposite direction, and making a decision and probably more apt to consider all the alternatives and make perhaps a more considered judgment. I don't mean that the military go off half-cocked at all, of course, but they certainly are a great deal more decisive, and once they've made a decision they kind of stick to it and don't go back and rehash the details and reconsider whether they did the right thing. There certainly is a much more decisive, aggressive atmosphere serving in the Pentagon than there is in the Department of State. The contrast was very, very marked to me. Then, too, I was often aware in the interagency committees of the frustration that the military officers felt at dealing with civilian officers who very frequently, of course, out-ranked them in making the final decisions. They were concerned only with the military consequences that might flow from actions and terribly conscious of who future opponents in any military struggle might be.

Q: Did you have dealings with, say, base problems?

SMITH: I'm not sure what you mean by base problems.

Q: I mean, I'm talking about base problems abroad. You put a military base into any area and this means an awful lot of young men. I speak as four years as an enlisted man in the Air Force serving both in Japan and Germany, and I have contributed to the problems as well as later as a foreign officer observing it, but I know that you can't do this without

diplomatic and political consequences as we're seeing in NATO today. So I'm really talking about this type of thing and how these were viewed within the Air Force when you were there.

SMITH: I certainly did, sir, in great detail. I had the good fortune, I was very much encouraged by the Secretary to travel.

Q: Who was the Secretary?

SMITH: At the time it was Harold Talbot. I was very much encouraged by him to travel as much as I could. I took my own plane and traveled many times to Europe and the Far East and other places inspecting bases, talking with enlisted people, with officers and with the commanding officers wherever I went. I really did visit bases all over the world. I served for nearly five years in this position. It was certainly a great education. I was very conscious of the matters you've discussed. Let me just give you a couple of examples from the high-level perspective, and then I'd be glad to talk about it from the lower-level perspective.

I had the good fortune to attend a very small meeting with General Francisco Franco when we concluded base agreements for the bases in Spain. The American Ambassador, John Davis Lodge, (my good friend and colleague from Connecticut) was with us and the Secretary of the Air Force. At the time General Francisco Franco said, “Well, I don't mind giving you all these base rights, but the one thing I will not have is to have all your American airmen coming in and upsetting the Spanish people by their conspicuous consumption. The wives of your enlisted personnel are able to wear their little fur jackets when they go out in the evening and things like that. This is just very upsetting to my people who have been through a long civil war and haven't had the opportunities to acquire things that even your airmen, let alone your top officers, have had. So I'm going to insist that people stay on bases as much as possible and have very limited contacts with our civilians and that they wear civilian clothes when they are off the base.” This, of course, was a little bit of an eye opener, but we did, with some reluctance, agree to

those conditions. I later spent a little time with General Franco alone. He asked me, since I had little children, would I like to come back and meet his grandchildren. And I went back into another part of his palace and met his daughter and grandchildren and had a very interesting talk with him.

Q: What was his approach towards the United States at that time, would you say?

SMITH: I think to be friendly. He welcomed having our air bases and our naval base there. He was a typical military man, I think. He wore a general's uniform. His outlook was that of a conservative military officer, really. But I think he was guardedly friendly to the United States. [Tape recorder turned off.]

When you speak of base problems, another “base-problem” occurs to me. It was one of the few times when I really had an opportunity for personal contact alone with President Eisenhower, which didn't happen often. I didn't have earthshaking problems to take up with him. But once when I was in the Pentagon on a Saturday afternoon when all the other secretaries and the Chief of Staff and Vice Chief of Staff were out of the building, I had a call from Governor Sherman Adams at the White House . . .

Q: He was the Chief of Staff at the White House at that time.

SMITH: Yes. He called and said, “David, you know about this airman in Alaska that's gotten in all this trouble?”

And I said, “Yes.”

He said, “I've been tipped off that it's going to be top headlines in tomorrow morning's Sunday edition of the Washington Post, and I think the President has got to know about it. He doesn't like surprises, and you better get out there since you're the senior officer of the Air Force in the Pentagon available, you better get out to see the President. He's out at Burning Tree playing golf.”

And I took a long, deep breath and said, “Yes, sir.”

So I went out to Burning Tree, and the President was . . .

Q: Burning Tree is a golf club in Washington.

SMITH: Yes. The President was, indeed, on the golf course. So I waited in the locker room for him and waited until he'd had a shower and was getting dressed. Then I went in and said to him, “Mr. President, I hate to bother you about a matter that I really don't feel deserves your attention or is worth bothering you about when you're trying to get a little relaxation, but I do want to you know an airman up at a base in Alaska has gotten in some trouble, and apparently it's going to be headlines in the paper tomorrow.”

He said, “My God, is that all? Did you come way out here just to tell me something like that? That's ridiculous. Get yourself a Scotch. All right. I'm glad you told me. Thanks a lot.”

Q: What was the problem?

SMITH: It would take a long time to describe it. It was not an important problem, but the Post thought it was, and it did make headlines the next morning in the paper. But I was delighted, of course, needless to say having expected to be chewed out for having let it happen. There's no way anyone in the Pentagon, civilian or military, could prevent a very minor personnel problem cropping up. But the President was very relaxed in his treatment of it, and I was very relieved.

Q: Speaking of accidents and problems, in Spain were you at all involved in the accidental dropping of a hydrogen bomb off the coast of Spain and all the repercussions after that?

SMITH: I think it was atomic, not hydrogen.

Q: Maybe it was.

SMITH: No, I was not. It happened years after I was out of government, but I think it was my old friend Angie Biddle Duke who was there at that time and went for a swim just to demonstrate that the water was not contaminated, and it was a good thing to do. No, it was long after my time.

Q: Well, anyway, I want to move on then. Let me ask the question, how did you become appointed Ambassador to Sweden? We're talking about 1976 under President Ford.

SMITH: Yes. That's correct. I was sitting one day in my law office in Washington on Pennsylvania Avenue when I had a call from a young man in the White House who said that President Ford would like to see me. I had had no thought whatsoever of returning to government service. I had a very, very successful law practice. I was representing an international bank and deeply involved in all kinds of legal problems and enjoying my practice a lot and enjoying life in Georgetown. There was no thought of returning to government. I never spoke to anyone about it. But I had known President Ford really quite well for a great many years. I first knew him when we both first came to Washington in about 1954, he as a congressman and I worked in the Department of State. We had seen each other from time to time, and then after the end of the Eisenhower years when I returned to New York, I always used to bring my graduate students from Columbia University down to Washington for a two-day visit a couple of times a year and asked many of my old friends including President Ford, then Congressman Ford and Speaker of the House, to speak to them. So over the years he had met with me each year for an hour or two, very generously. He was very generous with his time. I think he enjoyed the sharp, active questions of highly intelligent graduate students who were interested to learn about foreign affairs and government. So he knew me in that context as leading a group of graduate students. I guess he just thought he would like to see me back in government. So I went over to see him, and he told me he would like me to be ambassador in some country in Europe and was I interested.

And I said, “Well, I'd have to talk to my partners and my wife, but my initial reaction, well, I hadn't had a chance even to think about it. My initial reaction was it certainly would be great to be an ambassador, and I would be very interested.”

So he said, “Well, you go back and check with them, and if they agree with you . . .” and he told me who to see in the White House and talk about it.

Q: Was Sweden the job or were there several others?

SMITH: No, I was offered another position to another European country that would have been extremely interesting, but I declined it. The brother-in-law of one of my law partners was then ambassador there, and I felt it would be perceived as a stab in the back if he were recalled and out of office and I got his position. So I said, “No, I'm sorry. I can't take that.”

And the young man who was interviewing me said, “Mr. Smith, you know the train only stops once, and you're making a big mistake. You're getting your offer now.”

I said, “Well, I'm sorry. I have my own principles and honor, and I don't feel I could take that and I'm afraid if that's the only opportunity I'll have to say no.” So I was very saddened when I left.

To my great surprise I had a call a couple of weeks later saying, “We reported the situation to the President, and he said he still wants you to be an ambassador in Western Europe, and we're authorized to offer you another country.” He did offer me then another country and I started preparing for service there, and a couple of weeks later I was told that they had changed. They had rearranged a couple of appointments and instead they would like me to go to Sweden, was that acceptable.

And I said, “Well, that's even better. I'm just thrilled. and I'd be delighted to go there.”

Q: I wonder could you explain a little about how you were briefed. How did the Department prepare you? Obviously you were better prepared than the great majority of those who are politically appointed in that you had been teaching, you had worked in the State Department and all this. But still, how did sort of system work to get you ready for this?

SMITH: I just can't say enough for the Department's preparation. I thought it was excellent in almost every detail. I understand it's much more structured now than it was then, but even in 1976 I thought it was excellent. I was given a long schedule of appointments that would be made for me in almost every department of government usually starting with the top, a very brief meeting—usually brief, at least—with the Secretary and then briefings in that agency because after all an ambassador does come in contact with every conceivable field. While you wouldn't expect the Agriculture Department to have much impact on an ambassador in Europe or other departments that might be even more remote, nevertheless, they usually do come to the ambassador's desk. So in a sense it was a little course in civics and government, but with particular concern for the responsibilities of the ambassador and how it related to Sweden.

So I had appointments, as I said, at Agriculture, in the Pentagon which I was quite familiar with but brought up to date currently with each of the services in the Secretary of Defense's office, with the CIA, of course, where I met with now President Bush, who was then Director of the CIA. He and I had lunch together. As old friends we communicated very well, and I spent a day or two at the CIA and with each of the different branches of the government. Mainly, of course, the conferences were in the State Department. For some of them, for instance a unclassified briefing on terrorism, my wife was asked to join me so that she would be informed, too. But mostly it was just briefings for me arranged through the appropriate branch of the Department of State, and I was terribly, terribly disappointed they had to be crowded into too short a period.

I was hemmed in by the fact that Henry Kissinger had a visit already scheduled in Sweden and also immediately after that the King was to be married and go off on a three-month

honeymoon. He had set one day when he would receive new ambassadors, and if I wasn't there for that day I wasn't going to be accredited for months. So we had to encapsulate my briefings into a period of about three weeks, whereas, normally it ran something more like four or five.

Q: What was the situation, vis # vis the United States and Sweden? We're talking about you were there . . .

SMITH: In '76.

Q: When in '76?

SMITH: I landed in May.

Q: May of '76.

SMITH: About the first of May.

Q: What was the situation at that point?

SMITH: You mean relations between Sweden and the United States?

Q: Yes.

SMITH: Oh, they were excellent. There had been a great deal of friction over the Vietnam War, of course, under President Nixon. The ambassadors had been withdrawn and Olaf Palme, the Prime Minister, had made very derogatory remarks about President Nixon's conduct of the war in Vietnam and the bombing of Haiphong, and there was a great deal of feeling. The Swedes, of course, are neutral and were horrified at bombing of civilian targets and the conduct of the war in general. So mainly over that, there had been a great deal of friction, but with the end of the war it was the intention, I think, of the two governments that the month long trip of the King across the United States shortly

before I went to Sweden, followed up by the visit of Henry Kissinger to Sweden, that was supposed to clarify in public opinion that the situation was back to normal. I certainly found everywhere I went in Sweden in all circles an extremely friendly regard for the United States. You can hardly meet a Swede who doesn't have relatives somewhere in the United States, a great many in Minnesota and that part of the middle west. But everywhere they're eager to tell you about their third cousins and where they live in the United States. So there are all kinds of warm relations.

Q: Well, you're speaking of warm relations, but there must have been as there is in almost every other country, but I think it would be almost virulent in Sweden, sort of the left wing socialist labor group that anything that happens the United States is to blame. I mean, they come out of a Marxist environment. I'm not talking about Soviet. But I'm talking about a Marxist outlook in that we are the enemy, and it's where you've got to have an enemy and the United States is it for this thing.

SMITH: Oh, indeed there is. That was very prevalent. I didn't mean to suggest that this was a 100 percent situation. Traditionally the Communist Party in Sweden holds about 4 percent of the vote, and there is a small minority of dedicated Communists. Indeed, when Henry Kissinger came, there was a protest march through the streets of Stockholm that gave us great concern. We thought it might mar the visit. Actually it didn't particularly mar it, but all over Sweden buses were organized and largely young people were sent by bus and by train to Stockholm. And on the second day of his arrival there was a march through Stockholm. I observed the march. The young people marched about four or five abreast, many of them pushing baby carriages with them. They had gotten out their red banners from the last march which had been about a year before, and they were carrying tired old red banners plus a lot of new ones that were saying bad things about Kissinger. So on the extreme left, there was that.

Q: That was the Communist Party.

SMITH: That was the Communist Party.

Q: How about the left . . .

SMITH: I'm just getting to that. As to the Social Democrats, of course, there's anti-American feeling. It cropped up in some way or other almost daily in the Swedish newspapers. I eventually became proficient in Swedish so that I could read the newspaper, and of course I did, and I watched the news on television. It wasn't as much on television, but in the newspapers which are owned and edited by liberal publishers. There's both liberal and conservative press in Sweden. Of course, there were anti-American remarks, and the embassy gave great consideration whenever there was an article or editorial that was anti-American, and we took what steps we could to counter it. In fact, I personally went to the newspaper and to one of the radio stations on more than one occasion to object to matters that I felt they had published that were unfair to the United States.

Q: Well, how about television? I sort of have the picture, again, I speak of someone who's never been to Sweden, served there or dealt with it. You have what is true in many countries including parts of the United States the activists and often the most innovative people often come from sort of the left wing of any group, and Swedish cameramen and directors going out and going to the slums of Washington or New York or drug areas or crime areas is fair enough. But I mean, in other words, focusing in on the bad parts. Was this true on TV there or was it, would you say, the TV side, at least, was a fairly balanced picture about the United States?

SMITH: Remember we're in a different time period now. You're talking now in 1989 when we've just had a good many years off and on of very serious problems of the kind you're talking about. Those problems had begun to surface, of course, when I was there. There obviously had been student demonstrations in '68 and all, and drugs had become a problem and all those related issues. They weren't as much a part of our daily life back

in 1976 as they are today, and television has come a long way since then, too. So these things did come up on television, yes, they did. And there certainly were anti-American articles on television, too. There again I objected to them.

I do remember going to television executives and objecting to coverage that I thought was unfair to the United States. Of course, they always claimed they gave a balanced picture, and there were other articles that were more fair. There's no question that the American Ambassador does live a very sheltered life and it's all too easy to fall into a situation where the contacts you have and friends you make in the country come from a very privileged group who are more apt to be friendly to the United States than perhaps if they come from a different background in other parts of the country. But I made every effort to be in touch with all shades of opinion and different groups, and there's no question the group that you describe did exist very definitely in Sweden, but I don't think it was the overriding view of the Swedes. Basically, I think, they admired the United States and the bulk of the population certainly was friendly to the United States at the time when I was there.

Q: How about the students? You had had a lot of experience, of course, at Columbia which is not exactly a conservative student body, anyway. But, again, I would think the University of Stockholm and all, I mean, most universities particularly in Europe and many off in the Far East students tend to be much more radical than they are when they get out and get a job. Did you find this a problem? I mean, did you find you were sort of having a head to head with a lot of students.

SMITH: Yes, of course.

Q: And how did you handle this?

SMITH: I did meet with student groups in at least three universities there and spoke to them and had discussions with them. Of course, you're quite right, the students are a great

deal more liberal than my contemporaries were. I think you cope with each question as it arises. They objected to the United States foreign policy in many respects.

It's a funny thing, you know, the Swedes are very proud. There is one saying I heard constantly. You would think it's sort of adverse to them, and yet they would tell it with a certain pride. They would say, “Oh, yes. Well, you know, Sweden is the mother-in-law of the world in foreign policy!” They did. I constantly found that Swedes were trying to tell me how we should conduct our foreign policy. It's fine that they are so interested in it, but they truly are and, of course, there are all shades of opinion there. You're quite right, the student groups were a great deal more liberal, and I thought some of them perhaps too liberal. But I agree with you, that's the way bright, young students and graduate students are apt to be.

Q: We'll come back to the politics in a minute, but how did you find the embassy? You said there was a bad morale problem there. How did this develop? You mentioned part of this, but how did you deal with this? How did you find the staff?

SMITH: I found the staff just great. My experience there strengthened my great admiration and high regard for the Foreign Service. I think it was largely a matter of personality. It was described to me in Washington before I left. The ambassador who had been there immediately before me was an extremely intelligent man who has continued as a non-career ambassador in other posts and has given long service to this country. He tended, when he was in Sweden, to rely very heavily on his deputy chief of mission who had a proclivity for avoiding decisions. Many important papers that required action got lost either at his home or in his office. This had led to a total despair on the part of the staff. So I think that had a great deal to do with it.

Q: Oh, nothing can be more annoying.

SMITH: Well, it was really terrible when I arrived there. But I had been told that before hand. Actually, I guess, just with a single stroke you can cure a thing like that. I was

given an open hand to choose a deputy chief of mission which I think is customary with new ambassadors going in. I interviewed several men and didn't quite reach a decision when I left the United States because there was one who had been so highly described to me who was then serving as charg# on the continent. So I arranged by telephone—I suggested he meet me in London on the way, or if it didn't embarrass him too much, to come directly to Sweden as soon as I got there, which he did. He visited me over a long weekend. We walked along the canals for hours at a time talking about all sorts of things. I became totally taken with him, admired him tremendously, and asked him to come as soon as he could to join me as DCM. He couldn't leave immediately because he was charg#. So it was a couple of months delay before he could come. But as soon as he did come, he and I worked very closely together, and I think he was a model of perfection as a DCM. He was everything a DCM should and could be, and obviously that took a tremendous load off my shoulders. It didn't mean that I dropped things. But I had to serve as both ambassador and DCM for the first couple of months, until he came—which was good experience for me.

Q: Well, it's probably a very good learning experience.

SMITH: Yes, it is.

Q: This is how you learn how it's done. Who was your DCM?

SMITH: His name was Jack Perry. He was a Sovietologist and had served several years in Moscow and was charg# in Czechoslovakia at the time that I was appointed as ambassador.

Q: And later was he in Paris, too?

SMITH: Yes.

Q: As a junior officer. He and Frank Carlucci are two names that crop up again and again, of talking about really absolutely first-rate people no matter in what context.

SMITH: He was totally first rate.

Q: He's in North Carolina right now.

SMITH: Yes, he is. And I certainly had the highest regard for him. He had just the right sense of balance and dignity and long experience. Unfortunately I had to wait a couple of months before he could get there, but he was worth waiting for. I think I had done quite a bit to get morale on the right track before he got there, and as soon as he got there in no time at all we just didn't have any more problems at all with morale. It became very, very good. It was a total change.

Q: How did you find Henry Kissinger when he came? One gets what can only be called a mixed review. He's an absolutely brilliant man in some cases and absolutely a bulldozer and sort of secretive and other cases which impeded his effectiveness. How did you find him in your context in dealing with him?

SMITH: I found him great. I had known Henry Kissinger for a great many years. Each year during the years I was at Columbia he came at least once during the year to lecture to my graduate students in my International Fellows Program. So I had contact with him while he was a Harvard professor before he entered government service. The first time I saw very much of him after he was in government was when he came to visit in Sweden, and there, of course, I was with him from before 8:00 in the morning until on toward midnight at night for a couple of days. So it was very intensive contact. I'm a great admirer of Henry Kissinger. I recognize we all have all kinds of limitations, and I'm aware of all kinds of things people say about him. I think he was a good Secretary. He certainly had a superb grasp of foreign policy, and I liked his operations.

Q: Did he have any particular thing he was trying to push when he was in Sweden? Did he want the Swedes to do anything, or was this really a matter of kissing and making up?

SMITH: It was the latter. Being totally green in service as ambassador and new to the game, of course, I wanted this to be the most successful visit there ever was, and I'd spent quite a bit of time looking through some briefing books which I'd received in advance, a copy of what had been put together for the Secretary. So I'll describe a little brief meeting we had the first morning he was there that I think might amuse you. It certainly was a surprise to me. The Swedes wanted to be sure that he had total privacy and security. So instead of letting him stay at my residence or somewhere else, they had set aside for him a beautiful little 18th century palace in the midst of a rather large garden in the middle of Stockholm. So I appeared a little before the time that we were to meet and was outside with a couple of his traveling companions. He came out about 15 minutes early, to our surprise.

He looked around and said, “Well, let's get going.”

And one of them said, “Well, we just can't go there now. We'll arrive there ten minutes early at the foreign ministry and throw them all into confusion. We can't arrive ahead of time.”

So he said, “All right.” And he turned to me and said, “Let's go take a walk around that lake.” So the two of us together took a little walk around the lake. After asking me a few polite questions about how I liked Sweden and telling me what the weather was going to be like, he turned to me and said, “Tell me, what's this all about now? What does Palme want to talk to me about?”

And I somewhat gasped, “Well, I guess all the matters are in your briefing book that I'm sure you studied on the way over.”

And he said, “I don't have any idea what's in the briefing book. I had a lot of important work to do on the plane, and I haven't looked at it yet. What's it all about?”

And I said, “Well.” I took a long breath and I said, “I think he just wants to know your personal views and what American foreign policy is on each one of the major areas of the world and all the crises that are in existence at the moment.”

He said, “Oh, if that's all it is, that's easy. We can talk about that in my sleep. Now tell me more about how you find the Swedes.”

So that's how it went. That's pretty much what the conference was about. It was an all-day conference where Palme would ask a rather limited, direct question like, “What is the United States policy toward apartheid in South Africa? Is it going to be changing?” And Kissinger would give a 20-minute capsuled answer and then Palme would say, “Well, now tell me your views on Cambodia.” And it would progress like that around the world. Kissinger was sort of Kissinger lecturing to a group of college seniors, maybe.

Q: I'm taking that we wanted to have friendly relations with Sweden, but we didn't want the Swedes to particularly do anything for us.

SMITH: No, we really didn't. There were just almost no problems in the foreign relations between the United States and Sweden. There were a few very minor problems. There were some draft evaders that had gone to Sweden, and a few of them had married Swedish girls and had stayed on and were a problem about whether they were going to become Swedes or reclaim their United States citizenship. There were very minor problems like that but nothing of any great consequence. There were problems about stainless steel and what the quotas might be for importation of Swedish steel. But there surely were no major problems.

Q: Well, tell me, talking about Palme, now Palme I can shut my eyes and see a news picture of him holding a candle and marching in protest against what we're doing in

Vietnam. One does have the feeling, talking about mother-in-laws, in the majority sense, I mean, the Swedes do seem to be great meddlers, and their role in world politics has not been that progressive in many ways. I mean, they're a little bit like the Indians. But did you have a problem at the embassy as far as our offices were concerned of treating Palme like the devil and looking at him in more an objective sense or not? Or was this a problem or not?

SMITH: No, I don't think it was a problem. We definitely had very mature Foreign Service officers at the embassy, and they certainly were prepared to cope with any politician or government official and surely with the Prime Minister. I rather liked Palme, though. Of course, our views were basically very far apart on fundamental issues. I can tell you a couple of things about him that might be of interest.

Q: You said you were going to tell me several things about Palme.

SMITH: Palme was a very interesting man. It was often said that he had hypnotic eyes, and it's true even on television his eyes were very piercing. If he appeared on your screen making a speech, they really flashed. At the time I went to Sweden, he was sometimes described as the young Jack Kennedy of Europe. He had a certain charisma that certainly appealed particularly to the young people in Sweden. I found him likable. He had an interesting background. He really came from an aristocratic family. His mother had been a baroness from one of the Baltic countries—it was either Estonia or Lithuania, I think—and married a Swede, and he grew up in a rather important townhouse in Stockholm and was well-educated. He took a degree at Kenyon College in Ohio, and then took a long motorcycle trip around through the southern part of the United States and was very interested in problems among the black populations in our South. It is often said that that's where he became so imbued with socialism and the desire to better the needs of underprivileged people, though the other view on that is that he also spent quite a bit of time in India, and people who really studied his life, I think, feel that his social consciousness was developed more from the undernourished and impoverished people in

India than in our South. But for whatever reason, he certainly was interested in garnering mass votes.

I'm told that when he came back from his education and world travel, he went to the Conservative Party and told them he'd like to run for election to Parliament and they laughed at him and told him he was very young and inexperienced and he'd never get the nomination. So then he went to the Social Democrats and told them the same thing, and they were more practical and gave him the go ahead, and he was elected at a very young age. That's how he switched parties from the party he had grown up in. Then, of course, he was active in politics from then until his assassination.

I mentioned earlier that I had known him before I ever had any thought of going to Sweden through lunches or dinners at the Council on Foreign Relations and his appearances at Columbia University over a period of years. I think the most revealing experience I had as to Palme personally was something that happened during the last few days of my serving in Sweden. At that time, Palme was out of power, and he was living in Stockholm as the former Prime Minister and planning in his own mind that he would be Prime Minister again. I had a houseguest at the residence, Congressman Al Lowenstein, who has since died. He was staying with me on a short visit.

Q: He was considered quite a radical in his day, too.

SMITH: Yes, indeed. He was a very liberal congressman from New York, and he was on a world tour and stopped off in Sweden and expressed a wish to stay with us which he did. It was a Sunday evening about, perhaps, 8:00 or 9:00 and Congressman Lowenstein and my wife and I and my son Jeremy, who was visiting us from the States, were sitting in the library, talking. I was called to the phone for a telephone call from the Department of State in Washington, something having to do with my leaving Sweden and arrangements to make and all that. The doorbell rang. Being Sunday night we had dismissed the staff, and I was on the phone, so my wife went to the door, which she wouldn't ordinarily do.

One was very conscious of terrorist then, and she really shouldn't have gone to open the door but she did. I could hear her say, “Why, Mr. Prime Minister. What are you doing here? Do come right in.” And there was Olaf Palme all alone standing at the front door, unannounced and unexpected. So he came right in, and she came and tapped me on the shoulder and said, “You better get off the phone. Olaf Palme is here.” And I did as soon as I could and went upstairs, and then ensued about five hours of one of the most interesting discussions I ever had.

He sat in our library, the five of us did, and my wife and I and my son pretty much were more listeners than engaged participants in a discussion that went on until 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. It was quite obvious from the start that both of these two men, both of whom are dead now from assassins' bullet wounds, were long-time friends and active participants in the activities and meetings of international socialist groups. They were on an intimate, first-name basis, and they were largely reminiscing about socialist meetings around the world, in Portugal, in various countries in South America and in the Far East and in Europe, of the international socialist gatherings. They were talking about “Good old Joe” and “Good old Ben” like American college graduates reminiscing about undergraduate days, and talking about developments in the field of socialist activities in a way that was really fascinating to me. Although I'd studied these problems in an academic sense, I'd never heard intimate discussions by two men who were involved in the top-policy meetings of international socialism in this way, and it was truly fascinating to me.

Q: Did Palme understand the United States, or did he have a viewpoint that you felt was somewhat skewed?

SMITH: Well, of course, it was to me. I said earlier that we disagreed on fundamentals quite seriously. I found him a very engaging man. He was certainly charismatic and a true leader. You know, he couldn't have spent two or three or four years at Kenyon College. I'm not sure how many, but he graduated there in America's heartland without having had some understanding of it, and he couldn't have traveled all through our South as a young

undergraduate on a motorcycle without having some contact with people and knowing something of it, and then continuing meetings at least once a year, I'm sure, in the Council on Foreign Relations and at various American universities. I think he did have a grasp of it. His view of what we are and where we're going, I guess, would be quite different from mine, and, of course, in typical Swedish manner, he was eager to tell us all the things we were doing wrong and what we should be doing.

Q: Well, now did you have problems on the other side? Particularly I'm thinking of Congress. We had gone through a very bad period of time. We had felt Sweden had been helpful during the Vietnam War. There must have been a lot of resentment still over in Congress. I mean, you would have a senator getting up or a congressman making some public statement about the Swedes? Was this a problem for you?

SMITH: It really was not a problem, no. I think it probably existed a little bit, but it didn't attract that much attention, and I was not aware that it was a problem.

Q: Well, looking back on it—oh, the other thing . . .

SMITH: I should tell you one other detail. You said to me that you like personal reminiscences.

Q: Absolutely.

SMITH: An amusing thing that happened once. At one time I had a call from the Department of State from the Secretary's office that we were having considerable trouble in a small country in Africa that had a socialist government and where three American nurses had been arrested and imprisoned. We were getting nowhere with diplomatic overtures there, and the Secretary was afraid that it might get out of hand and get worse and become a real problem. Did I think it would be helpful if I interceded with the government of Sweden and see if they could intercede and get somewhere?

So I went and called on the Prime Minister and described the situation to him and said, “You know, this is outrageous. Here these three American nurses that really have been thrown into jail in this very primitive country, and I would think that you with your good relations with that Prime Minister and their government could be able to help us and this would be a nice gesture for you to make toward the United States.”

And he said, “Well, you know, I agree with you. I think that is outrageous, and I'll call him up. You stay right where you are, and I'll call him up.” And he called and had a rather frank discussion, and the three nurses were released within 24 hours.

Q: This shows how the work of ambassadors with prime ministers often can be down to the very nitty gritty, but really it works. What was the Swedish view of the Soviets while you were there? How did they feel about the Soviet Union?

SMITH: The Swedes certainly were very conscious that they're a small, neutral country right under the Soviet guns, and they are not going to antagonize the Soviets without serious provocation, and I was always conscious that if they made any bow toward the United States, if one of their Royal Family or some member of the government made a goodwill trip to the United States, simultaneously or within a month or two, someone of equal rank would make a trip to the Soviet Union. They tried to be very even-handed in their foreign policy toward the United States and NATO on the one hand and toward the Soviet Union on the other hand. Certainly their Foreign Ministry had a number of highly trained Foreign Service officers for whom I had great regard, who were extremely informed Sovietologists and who went regularly to the Soviet Union.

I can remember two of them in particular whom I knew quite well who went regularly to the Soviet Union, in and out, and visited with their ambassador there and kept in very close touch. So I felt they had very good relations with the Soviets. It was on a basis that was correct and proper, but I didn't feel it was a basis of affection. At least they were adroit

enough and diplomatic enough always to make me feel that their sympathies lay with the West, but they had to maintain correct relations with the Soviets.

Q: How about the military? Did they view the Soviets as the natural opponent, the Soviet military?

SMITH: Opponent of theirs or ours?

Q: Of theirs.

SMITH: No, I don't think so. Having served for five years in the Pentagon, I naturally had a certain fascination with the military, and I made it a point to keep in close touch with the Swedish military. I did go to inspect a number of Swedish bases and ships and aircraft. I flew in Swedish military aircraft, helicopters and two-seater fighters, and inspected the bases and knew their chiefs of staff. Another thing that I did once that, I guess, was probably undiplomatic but it was of interest to me, and it seemed to me it was perfectly proper for an ambassador to do, and I never got into any trouble about it, and I think, maybe, it was helpful. I let it be known through channels that I would like to have some sort of a briefing on Swedish war plans. Of course, I was well aware that war plans are about the most classified part of any government activities, so I said on a very low informational basis, but I'd like to know about it, and would they arrange a briefing for me. And I got the word back that this was a very unusual request, no ambassador had ever made such a request before. I did it on my own without any conference with Washington. It just sort of sat for about four or five weeks, nothing happened. Then I called up again, I called the chief of staff of their defense staff and said I was waiting for an answer and when was I going to have my briefing. And he hemmed and hawed a little bit and said he would call back again. Finally, he called and said if I wanted to bring one military attach#, my senior military attach# and come to his office, he would do the briefing himself with no staff of any kind from any of the services, and he would be glad to answer all my questions. So we spent about three hours with a rather interesting discussion of what their

war plans were with regard to all possible antagonists in Europe. Well, I can say it's a long time ago, but basically I can say their defense and their offense was all aimed toward the East.

Q: Well, the only logical . . .

SMITH: Yes, almost entirely. And which, of course, I observed at the time. They're well aware of NATO defenses and operations and have some understanding of what would be Soviet intentions. But it was fascinating to me. At that time, the United States was supplying the most important part of the Swedish fighter planes which were very, very fine, but we were supplying the black boxes to them.

Q: The black boxes for the thing, the electronics.

SMITH: Yes, that guided armament. The plane would be launched. The Swedes were making these for themselves. They had a small but very well-trained, high-disciplined, high-morale air force, and they were making these planes for themselves. But, of course, they also were very interested in selling them to countries that might like to buy them. There was a good deal of activity in their seeking to obtain the United States' permission to sell them to certain other countries, countries that, I guess, we would call Third World, emerging Third World countries. Quite a bit of that came across my desk in one form or another, and I had to be the one to convey a negative reply to them that we would not approve of sales to the countries that wanted to buy them, India specifically, but other countries, too. So that limited the commercial aspects. They would have been happy to make more of the planes than they were making.

Q: How did you get along with the government of the three-party coalition with Thorbj#rn F#lldin?

SMITH: Yes, he became Prime Minister.

Q: Was there any change in their policy towards the United States at this point?

SMITH: I can't really say that there was. I'd say the policy was friendly in both cases, although Olaf Palme was, as you suggest, somewhat unfriendly toward basic United States feelings in many respects, and F#lldin was more friendly. I don't think the policies of the government were significantly different. The Conservative Coalition would have liked to have made very considerable changes in a great many domestic matters in Sweden, and I would say their foreign policy came closer to being bipartisan between the Social Democrats and the Coalition. The trouble was that the Coalition had a razor-thin margin in Parliament, and it was almost impossible for them to get much done in the brief period they were in office.

Q: We're coming to the end of this, and I know you have another engagement. A question we like to ask of all the people who participate in this program is looking back on your time as ambassador, what gave you your greatest satisfaction or accomplishment?

SMITH: Oh, there were so many rewards to serving as ambassador. I really wouldn't know how to pick out one that was the greatest. I guess it was the great pride that comes from representing your country. I'm extremely patriotic and very proud of being an American and to be the representative of the United States of America in a foreign country. It just filled me with the greatest pride in every respect, I guess, whether it was at public functions where I was showing the flag in a way, where American athletes were competing in one sport or another, or in whatever I did I was very conscious of being the American Ambassador and wanted to set a very high standard for what America stood for. I'm extremely proud of being an American and being in that capacity. I think that's what gave me the greatest pride, probably.

Q: And a final question. In your connection with student groups and various organizations involved in international affairs, I'm sure that you have young people looking forward to a career saying, “What about the Foreign Service as a career?” How do you reply now?

SMITH: I constantly encourage young people to go into the Foreign Service. I encourage them that serving the United States is the greatest experience and the most challenging and rewarding experience that a young man or a young woman can have. I do have continuing contact with students.

I had lunch with a group of students at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies just a couple of weeks ago. It's a group that are sponsored through fellowships offered by a foundation of which I'm chairman, and so I meet from time to time with them. They are not necessarily studying for the Foreign Service. We all know how highly competitive it is to receive appointments in the Foreign Service now. But I always encourage all of them to persevere, that the Service has great rewards. I also tell them that it requires great patience, that like every other career young people who are ambitious and want to get ahead sometimes become very annoyed at bureaucratic and other hurdles that they have to cross. I think that's true in the Foreign Service the same as it's true in medicine or law or business or any other field. Young people are ambitious and energetic and want to move faster than the system usually will allow. But I do feel it is an extremely rewarding career, both among the people who have already cast their lot in the field of foreign service at Columbia or Woodrow Wilson, Johns Hopkins, or many of the other schools that have prepared graduate students specifically to go into the Foreign Service, and also just among the body of students generally. I do always encourage them. It's a great career and a great opportunity to participate in what's going on in the world, and to be able to make their imprint on world developments. So I'm all for it.

Incidentally, I'd like to say a word if you tell me we're about to close.

Q: Yes, go ahead.

SMITH: I'd like to say one comment. I was a founder and I'm still a director, and an officer, of an organization called the Council of American Ambassadors. It's made up of about 190 former ambassadors, all of them non-career, former ambassadors of the United States,

and we meet two or three times a year, usually in Washington but occasionally in other places like the United Nations for briefings from officers in the Department and others. Our purpose is to endorse a bipartisan, consistent foreign policy. We seek to do what we can as former ambassadors to assist and improve the career Foreign Service. We make ourselves available to testify in Congress, to write articles, to speak on the radio, or do anything we can on behalf of the Foreign Service, and to tell the country how much all of us admire the career Foreign Service.

It's a rather formidable organization, really, when you think of 190 former ambassadors. We, of course, do not exclude career ambassadors because they are career, it's rather that they have their own very well functioning organization, and we're not in competition with them in any way.

Q: No, I understand.

SMITH: It's just simply we thought it would be helpful if there were an organization made up of non-career ambassadors.

Q: No, I think it's a very, very useful organization. Well, Mr. Ambassador, I want to thank you very, very much.

SMITH: It's been a great pleasure appearing with you, and I welcome this opportunity, and I'll be glad to do anything I can to help.

Q: Good.

End of interview